

Venting That's Flat Out Wrong

By Joseph P. Guzzo



It is well known that Massachusetts has one if not the strictest plumbing codes in the Country. I see it as the others being weak, but hey that's me. However we have been criticized for having such rigid regulations. One subject open for debate is section 10.16, venting. I have heard the term over venting used many times when referring to this section. The proper working operation of the drainage system depends so much on the venting system that I don't think it is possible to over vent. But venting the drainage system incorrectly is like having no vent at all. Problems attributed to poor venting are, stoppages, slow fixture drainage, and loss of trap seals. And for those that don't take this seriously, poor drainage and venting design contributed to the transmission of the Sars virus when trap seals were lost in floor drains. The Sars epidemic in Hong Kong a few years ago killed over 300 people and made hundreds of others very ill, these numbers grew even higher as the virus spread to 30 countries.

The design of a sanitary waste and vent system must be engineered properly. There actually may be only a couple of ways to pipe it correctly and hundreds of ways to screw it up. I have seen the hundreds, maybe thousands. One such popular venting practice is the flat vent. It is the continuation of a horizontal pipe (vent) off the run of a wye, and up the partition. This would be perfectly acceptable if the pipe (vent) were connected to a fixture, this would be a wet vent, but when dry it is flat out wrong. The correct way is to take the vent off the branch, preferably a TY on at least a 45 degree angle off the horizontal drain before the trap. I have seen so many flat dry vents it's almost as if it was taught to plumbers. But it wasn't, or was it, we'll get back to that. This incorrect method is just a little easier to pipe by continuing the horizontal drain in a straight line and up the partition. Not so easy when you have to do it over though.

As far as the teaching is concerned, as I see it in school Apprentices are for the most part taught the correct way. But there may be particular subjects that are not taught at all. Some teachers skipping over important sections perhaps because they are not comfortable teaching them or think that many items will be taught in the field by experienced licensed plumbers. This is what I call the vicious cycle of teaching apprentices in the field the wrong way. I have heard it over and over again and again, "I've been doing it like that for twenty five years." My response would be, well you've been doing it wrong for twenty five years, and how many apprentices have you taught the wrong way? It's not all bad, I also give credit where credit is due, and have seen lots of beautiful workmanship, excellent piping jobs that plumbers are and should be proud of. I just wish there was more of it.

Venting is not that complicated, you just have to go back to the basics and use common sense. It's one thing to teach first year apprentices, but when I have to explain in detail how to vent a horizontal drain to a Master Plumber, Massachusetts we have a problem here, and it's not over venting.

Next issue I will describe another disaster I see in the field Battery Venting.